

APPENDIX 8

Newspaper Article on the issue of Freedom Camping

Camping free comes at a cost

By [Jim Eagles](#)

Just down the Seabird Coast from where I have a bach is a long stretch of beach alongside which runs a well-worn vehicle track. At the height of summer I have counted 70 motorcaravans, caravans, vans, trucks, buses, cars and tents parked there.

It's easy to see why the site is so popular. Stopping there is free, there are superb views across the Hauraki Gulf, the birdlife is spectacular, fishing is good, at high tide it's a nice place to swim and you get the impression there is a nice spirit of camaraderie.

But as the numbers have grown over the years I have become increasingly concerned about what the environmental impact might be. When there were only a dozen or so of these freedom campers it seemed charming. When there are more than 50 it starts to raise questions.

What is the effect of so much activity on the birdlife? Most of the motorcaravans probably have toilets and holding tanks but what about the rest? Do they all take away every piece of rubbish? Are there health risks in having so many people crowded into such a small area? Does it make sense that residents, bach owners and camping ground operators have to meet all sorts of requirements while 150 or so people can live on this tiny strip of land coastal for days at a time with no restrictions at all?

And, unfortunately, this isn't a problem that's going to go away any time soon. There are more freedom campers - both locals and overseas visitors - every year. And there are several good books around which advise on the best free places to camp ... including the one near me.

I wouldn't want to see freedom camping banned, as it is in nearby Thames-Coromandel District, but I do think something needs to be done. And there's a growing chorus of councils around the country saying the same thing.

The Freedom Camping Forum, which represents 20 different groups including campervan companies and the Motor Caravan Association, recently put out a statement declaring that "the negative impact some freedom campers are having on the environment and community wellbeing is unacceptable".

The forum thinks the best solution is an education campaign and, in particular, for campervan operators to ensure their customers understand how they are expected to behave. It has already set up an advisory website (www.camping.org.nz) which urges freedom campers to check before setting up camp and to follow the local rules.

That's good advice but, sadly, experience suggests it is unlikely to be followed by everyone. At the Seabird Coast site, for instance, there are signs stating quite clearly that it should only be used by fully self-contained vehicles, stays should be for no more than two nights, dogs are forbidden and all rubbish should be removed. Almost every time I drive past some of those rules are being ignored.

Personally, I think the answer lies with the many responsible freedom campers. Unfortunately, it's not enough for the good guys to follow the rules themselves. They also need to ensure others do the same (even blowing the whistle if necessary). And the freedom campers will be the only losers if their freedom is curbed.

NZ Herald 13 April 2010

Note: There has been significant progress towards the formal management of freedom camping since this report was initially drafted. The Ministry for the Environment, MfE, has taken a leadership role in picking up on the results of collaborative work that has occurred throughout the country over the last year or two. The upshot is that freedom camping will become illegal as a consequence of an amendment to the Local Government Act 2002, whereby councils will be empowered to issue infringement notices / fines to freedom campers. This change in legislation is target to occur prior to the 2011 Rugby World Cup.

The only camping facilities that will be then available will be:

- Commercial holiday parks / camping grounds
- Department of Conservation camping facilities
- Other "designated areas" – specific areas designated for camping by local authorities